

June 26, 1955

Dr. H. B. Glass
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Dear Bentley:

I am writing to you specifically in your capacity as President of the American Institute of Biological Sciences, but without precluding a possible relationship to your other interests.

I want to ask whether you would not think that an adequate dictionary would be of very great value to biologists in all fields, and be especially useful to help maintain communication from one field to another. The problem first came to my attention when an editor of one of the better technical-medical dictionaries asked for some advice on a few terms. After looking through this dictionary, and a number of others, I concluded 1) the best that was now available was not nearly good enough; 2) how very valuable a reliable technical dictionary would be.

An enterprise of this kind is not going to be easy. However, if the A.I.B.S. were to take an interest in it, and act as liaison between one of the commercial publishers and the community of biologists, I think we would see a great improvement over what is now available. The existing dictionaries suffer mostly from being stuffed with deadwood, but also (perhaps especially in genetics!) the definitions are not often enough precise and up-to-date, and too many terms are left out. To my mind, a project of this kind would probably be at least as valuable as the Handbook of Biological Data which is being pursued so extensively.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg

P.S. I am sending a copy of this letter to Margaret Green and perhaps a couple of others to see what kind of reaction they have too.